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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BOGOTA 002348

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PHUM PTER CO

SUBJECT: PBI REPRESENTATIVES CONFIRM PEACE COMMUNITY WILL
NOT SPEAK TO FISCALIA INVESTIGATORS

REF: A. BOGOTA 2156

B. BOGOTA 1999

C. BOGOTA 1918

D. 2002 BOGOTA 10751

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood for reasons 1.4 (d).

Summary

1. (C) On March 4, Embassy officials met with local representatives of Peace Brigades International (PBI), who described their visit to the massacre site of eight civilians in the Uraba region of Antioquia Department and confirmed that the "peace community" to which the victims belong will not cooperate with Government authorities in their investigation of the crime. PBI representatives continued to echo peace community claims that the Colombian Army was responsible for the killings, but said the perpetrators were probably members of the 17th, not the 11th, Brigade. Embassy officials will continue to follow up on this case and plan to travel to the region in the near future. End Summary.

PBI Volunteer Describes Visit to Massacre Site

2. (C) On March 4, Embassy officials met with representatives of Peace Brigades International (PBI), a UK-based NGO whose members accompany local NGOs and human rights organizations threatened by illegal armed actors. PBI, which has representatives living in the port of Turbo, in the Uraba region of Antioquia Department, has increased its twice weekly accompaniment of the "peace community" of San Jose de Apartado to full time since the February 22 massacre of eight community members (ref C). Erica, a Canadian citizen who lives in Turbo, traveled with the investigative commission that visited the massacre site on February 25 (ref C). She said approximately 100 members of the peace community, accompanied by members of PBI and the San Francisco-based Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR), traveled to the massacre site near the town of La Resbalosa in three groups. She claimed that when her group arrived at the site, the soldiers stationed there surrounded the group with weapons raised. This intimidating display ended on the commanding officer's orders. Erica said the investigative team from the Prosecutor General's Office ("Fiscalia") arrived at the site immediately thereafter.

3. (C) Erica told Emboffs the dismembered bodies of Alejandro Perez, Alfonso Bolivar, and his wife and two children all appeared to show signs of torture. Additionally, investigators found an ax and two machetes at the site. She said the mass grave appeared to her to be undisturbed, but she understood from others that a young man had found the site earlier and replaced the cocoa bean shells he had removed. Erica added that Fiscalia representatives and some soldiers were taking pictures, but that the NGO representatives were not allowed to do so.

4. (C) As the Fiscalia exhumed the bodies of the five, another member of the community who had been separated from the group arrived to report that she had seen another body by the Mulatos River. The FOR representatives and 15-20 members of the peace community traveled to the new site and found the bodies of Luis Eduardo Guerra and his wife and son, along with two machetes. They reported this information to the group at the first site. Fiscalia representatives arrived at the second site on the morning of February 27, following logistical problems that prevented an earlier arrival. While members of the community waited for the Fiscalia team, they reported that a soldier from the 33rd Battalion of the Army's 17th Brigade picked up one of the machetes and wiped it clean in the river. PBI said this incident was reported to the Fiscalia. PBI also alleged that the mother of Luis Eduardo Guerra told members of the peace community that soldiers from the 17th Brigade had detained her and other members of her family in their nearby home, allowing them to leave only after representatives of the peace community stopped by the house on their return from the gravesite.

Peace Community Will Not Cooperate with Fiscalia

15. (C) PBI confirmed that peace community leaders have no intention of cooperating with the Fiscalía and will not give their full version of the massacre until the Inter-American Court of Human Rights' hearing on the peace community already scheduled for March 14 in San Jose, Costa Rica. In response to Emboff's question, the PBI representatives said they did not know how many of the alleged witnesses to the massacre would attend the hearing on behalf of the peace community. They said the peace community's decision not to cooperate with the Government was based on security concerns and their opinion that talking with Government investigators was useless, since no progress had been made in previous investigations in which peace community residents had cooperated. Emboff asked if witnesses would be willing to speak with Fiscalía authorities if their official statements could be signed on their behalf by a lawyer, thus preserving their confidentiality and, presumably, their personal security. PBI said alternatives had not been discussed.

16. (C) On March 3, the sectional director of the Fiscalía in Antioquia Department, Francisco Galvis, attributed the massacre to the FARC and said "this irregular group (FARC) uses the peace community as a rest and relaxation spot." Francisco Galvis is not involved in the investigation of this crime, as it is being handled by the Bogota Human Rights Unit of the Fiscalía. Elba Beatriz Silva, Director of the Human Rights Unit, told poloffs (septel) that this comment was completely inappropriate, that Galvis had been reprimanded, and the Fiscalía was continuing its impartial investigation.

PBI Blames the Army's 17th Brigade

17. (C) Erica explained that the alleged witness to the killings, who is mentioned in the various communiques the peace community has released, was a worker on a farm near the massacre site. She said he is currently in hiding, but spoke to members of the peace community before he left. Erica said the first allegations were made against the 11th Brigade because it had operations in the area. Erica said she was unaware that the original communique from the peace community claimed the witness said the perpetrators specifically identified themselves as members of the 11th Brigade. She said PBI now believes the perpetrators were members of the 33rd Counter guerrilla Battalion of the Army's 17th Brigade. These allegations, which have been categorically denied by the GOC and Ministry of Defense, have been echoed publicly by former Apartado mayor Gloria Cuartas and Father Javier Giraldo, director of the Center for Investigations and Popular Education (CINEP). Erica claims to have no knowledge of any presence by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) in the San Jose de Apartado area.

Additional Information

18. (SBU) PBI has met with various foreign embassies in Bogota and has a meeting scheduled with Vice-President Francisco Santos on March 9. In response to Emboff's question on the role of civilian authorities in the peace community, Erica said that although new local representatives of the Human Rights Ombudsman's Office ("Defensoria del Pueblo") and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had not been visiting the community as frequently as their predecessors, their visits had increased when the issue was raised at higher levels.

Comment

19. (C) The Embassy will continue to insist on a rapid, transparent and full investigation, and try to restrain the tendency on both sides to politicize the issue and sink into political name calling. The peace community's refusal to cooperate with the same civilian investigators it denounces for failing to effectively prosecute crimes against it will make a swift and thorough investigation of this case difficult. PBI representatives' denial of the well-documented FARC presence in the area (ref D) is also disturbing, as are the public statements of the Antioquia Department prosecutor citing peace community connections to the FARC; whatever the political facts, the investigation much be impartial. We will continue to follow this case closely, calling it as we see it. Emboffs plan to visit the city of Apartado in the near future.

WOOD